## Kids' Moment

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Is it hard to wait?

"I remember when our boys learned to walk; I remember when they learned to ride a bike. It all happened so fast; it felt like it happened overnight!

But they couldn't wait to grow up. Sometimes I think kids grow up too fast; they miss so many wonderful things along the way because they're always looking ahead, wanting to be older, bigger . . .

Once upon a time Jesus was a little boy about your age. You remember the stories at Christmas about when he was born? The Bible tells us how he grew up: "The little child began to grow up. He became stronger and wiser, and God's blessings were with him. …(He) continued to learn more and more and to grow physically. People liked him, and he pleased God." (Luke 2:40, 52 ICB)

Just like Jesus, you're growing up too, and that's a good thing. But I want you to know that right now you're already special, and I like you just the way you are.

## Invitation to the Table

You and I are works in progress, in fact, humanity as a race is still evolving. Life is a journey—a process; it follows a trajectory.

Physically the trajectory is set by genetics: your height, your gender, your ethnicity, eye color, hair color, your sexual identity…

Psychologically, your trajectory is more complicated. It involves genetics, but also is shaped by your experiences in relationship with other people.

Spiritually… Wow! The most complicated of all. Our whole being—the cumulative experiences of life, especially our joys and our disappointments, figure into our spiritual trajectory. And geography… People born in India—if they're at all religious or spiritual—are most likely to be Hindu; people born in the Middle East are more likely to be Jewish or Islamic; Islam also is prevalent in North Africa; Buddhism in the far East…

People born in the USA are statistically more likely to be Christians; although the numbers are decreasing as the trend in Western culture is more and more eclectic, with a splash of hedonism: a little bit of everything, as long as it feels good.

At this Table we recognize the complications of Western spirituality, because the call to follow Jesus is sometimes just too demanding—"make disciples of every nation!" And yet, here we are: wondering if we'll ever get there, but finding comfort in the words, "I am with you, 'til the end of the age."

Our Communion Hymn is #420, "I Come with Joy!"

## Pastoral Prayer

Creating God, Light of the World, Guiding Spirit, we come seeking your guidance and strength for our spiritual journeys. We long to walk closer to you, to understand your will, and to live lives that reflect your love and grace, but the way is dark sometimes. Sometimes there are confusing intersections and detours. Grant us the courage to face those challenges, the light of your wisdom to discern your path, and the humility to surrender our will to yours when we think we know a better, faster, easier route. We pray for your Holy Spirit to fill us and empower us to be faithful disciples and to be a light to those around us—a beacon of inclusive welcome and compassionate caring, reaching out proactively through the gifts and resources of our people to administer wholeness in a fragmented world. May our journey be marked by growth, perseverance, and a deepening love for you and for our neighbors. In Jesus' name, Amen.

MATTHEW 4:27-48 (NRSVUE) *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' [28] But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart. ... [31] "It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' [32] But I say to you that anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, causes her to commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. [33] "Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.' [34] But I say to you: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, [35] or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. [36] And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. [37] Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'; anything more than this comes from the evil one. [38] "You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' [39] But I say to you: Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also... [43] "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' [44] But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? [47] And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? [48] Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

The Word of God for the people of God!

About that last sentence: *"Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* Anybody here perfect? Not yet? Don't let it intimidate you or use it to justify giving up on yourself. In the original language, the word is an adjective referring *to attaining a purpose, being complete*. It's a process—a trajectory toward that purpose. It's the same word Jesus uttered on the cross: "It is finished." "Nobody's perfect!" Therefore, you're not expected to be; but you are expected to be in process—on a trajectory toward being completely who God created you to be.

Life is a process; a trajectory.

I shot an arrow into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For, so swiftly it flew, the sight
Could not follow it in its flight.

I breathed a song into the air,
It fell to earth, I knew not where;
For who has sight so keen and strong,
That it can follow the flight of song?

Long, long afterward, in an oak
I found the arrow, still unbroke;
And the song, from beginning to end,
I found again in the heart of a friend. **The Arrow and the Song** by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

And from the Lebanese poet, Kahlil Gibran:

"You are the bow from which your children as living arrows are sent forth.
The archer sees the mark upon the path of the infinite, and He bends you with His might that His arrows may go swift and far.
Let your bending in the archer's hand be for gladness.
For even as He loves the arrow that flies, so He also loves the bow that is stable."

Trajectories.

Apollo 13 was intended to be the third lunar landing, but with the now iconic words, "Houston, we have a problem," Jack Swigert reported a major oxygen tank explosion in the Command Module which forced the crew to abort their lunar landing and focus on returning safely to Earth.

As in each Apollo mission, a precise trajectory had been calculated. The slightest deviation one way would have brought the command module too steeply into the lunar gravitational pull and it would have crashed into the moon.

The slightest deviation in the opposite direction would have brought the command module into the moon's gravitational pull at too shallow an angle and it would have ricocheted helplessly into infinity.

When the oxygen tank exploded the spacecraft was thrown off the trajectory. The crew transferred to the Lunar Module for life support and used its descent engine to execute a mid-course correction and bring it back on track.

But the trajectory was not defined by deviations or mechanics or mathematics; it was defined by its purpose; and although they didn't land on the moon, the mission was called a "successful failure," because the astronauts returned safely.

There's a biblical trajectory implied in Creation, defined in the covenant with Abraham, reinforced by the Hebrew prophets, finished in Jesus. In today's Gospel reading Jesus alludes to the trajectory when he says, ***"You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times… But…*** The implication seems clear: what they were told wasn't the whole story; there was more coming, the trajectory wasn't complete.

And, as in the Apollo 13 mission, there are deviations along the journey—times when God's people get off track—"Houston, we have a problem!"—and a mid-course correction has to be executed to draw us back online.

Sadly, some Christian doctrines are built on the deviations; but the biblical trajectory is not defined by the deviations or the theology or doctrines involved; it is defined by its purpose, revealed in the Word-become-flesh: Jesus of Nazareth. Looking through the lens of Jesus, the primary biblical trajectory becomes clear.

But, what about the deviations? They're in the Bible, too. But not everything in the Bible is Christlike. Out in our parking lot are a couple dozen cars and SUVs and trucks. Not one of those vehicles just suddenly appeared fully made out of thin air. There was a process that began with an idea, extracted raw materials from the

earth, processed them into steel and plastic and fiberglass; tools were developed, molds created, parts produced, dies cast, and then it all had to be put together before the vehicle rolled off the assembly line. But the process is not defined by any of the intermediate points along the trajectory. It's defined by the finished product.

This amazing universe didn't just appear. God created it in six stages.

Human understanding of God doesn't just happen! God has revealed the divine presence from the beginning and has inspired human understanding, but humans aren't capable of grasping the whole truth of God all at once; so the Bible is a journal of God's people, growing and maturing toward knowing who God is and what it means to be in covenant with God. We're not there yet, and there have been deviations along the way—distractions. And some of God's people still struggle through some of those distractions. I pray daily that my faith is not mired in some deviation—that I'm not leading away from the primary trajectory.

So, let's trace the biblical trajectory. Here are some of the high points:

I don't think it's a stretch for us to infer God's intentions in the ***Creation*** narratives. God created the cosmos and called it "good." God created humanity and called the whole creation "very good." I think when the narrative says God walked "in the cool of the evening," looking for the man and the woman, an intimate relationship between creator and creature is clearly implied.

God's ***Covenant with Abraham*** reaffirms and defines God's intentions in the promise that through Abraham "all peoples of the earth" will be blessed. This is a mid-course correction. Abraham had come out of pagan religions characterized by groveling appeasement and bribery through sacrifice; in fact, Abraham was going to sacrifice his own son; but God showed him a better way. The covenantal structuring of the divine/human relationship implied in creation is a relationship, not between equals but characterized by mutual consent and participation.

At Sinai, nothing in the Abrahamic covenant was changed. But what the covenant left open-ended took on structure. ***The Ten Commandments*** are descriptive rather than prescriptive. They describe life as it is intended to be lived in covenant with God. The deviation is in later legalistic applications.

The ***Hebrew prophets*** offered a number of mid-course corrections to Israel's increasingly legalistic adherence to the law. They called for justice as a priority over Temple Sacrifice and liturgy.

Last week I mentioned the story of ***Hosea***, who took his unfaithful wife back into his home and into his heart. His story draws Israel back toward the primary trajectory of their Scriptures.

The ***Year of Jubilee*** in Leviticus, possibly part of the training material for

priests in Josiah's reform, is one of the Bible's clearest metaphors of God's justice. It was an extension of the sabbatical year, called Shmita or "year of release." The land was to rest, to lie fallow—no crops planted. Debts were to be forgiven, private lands were to become open to the commons, and staples like food storage and perennial harvests were to be freely distributed and accessible to all. Walter Brueggeman called it God's "distributive justice."

Every seventh Shmita (every 50 years) was to be a Jubilee with all the measures of Shmita PLUS, all properties were to be returned to the original owners. Apparently, Jubilee was never observed, which comes as no surprise, yet, no concept or idea more intimately describes the grace and justice of God toward which the trajectory of the biblical message is directed.

Finally, "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." In Mark's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples three times that his mission is not about military revolution and the establishment of empire. The salvation of the world—and therefore their salvation and ours—will come when people put service ahead of power—when people become like little children. And the biblical trajectory continues in the church.

Sometimes a mid-course correction to the deviations and sidetracks and dead ends of the church comes from the most unexpected sources. Jimi Hendrix—yeah, that Jimi Hendrix: rock star, fabulous guitarist, said, "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."

When the Bible is read through the lens of Jesus, its primary trajectory stands out. There's no empire in Jesus' future; nor is empire relevant in the biblical trajectory of Grace. While Israel set their compass toward a return to imperial grandeur, Jesus executed a mid-course correction that maintained the trajectory toward a kingdom grounded in love. At the very least, Jesus' life is an Incarnational Model of life lived "at one" with God, evidence that it can be done. The cost may be heavy; but it can be done.

Pray with me.